

OBITUARY

BASIL JOSEPH MACNULTY Ph.D., B.Sc., F.R.I.C., F.R.E.S.

Basil MacNulty died suddenly on 12th April 1994 at his home in Rhossili, on the Gower Peninsula. He was born on 14th June 1915 and spent his early childhood in Leighton Buzzard. When he was ten the family moved to Wimbledon where he later attended Wimbledon College before going on to London University. Basil read chemistry and remained there until 1939 taking his Ph.D. and teaching. Shortly before the outbreak of war he joined the War Office, working in research and development of explosives, initially at Woolwich and later in South Wales when the establishment was evacuated from London.

It was while involved in this war work that Basil met and married his wife Dodo as well as developing his abiding love for the Gower Peninsula. After the war his career with the Ministry caused him to be posted at different times to The Woolwich Arsenal, Runcorn in Cheshire and Waltham Abbey where the family lived for 19 years, but perhaps the posting of most interest to him, certainly entomologically, was to Nigeria between 1952 and 1958. Here he worked in the Tropical Testing Establishment and was able to make an extensive collection of West African insects, especially Lepidoptera and Coleoptera. He was later to publish much material based on this period.

Basil's interest in insects had begun, as for so many of us, at a very early age, with the pursuit of butterflies, and there are family stories of his early collecting from the age of six. During the period that he lived in Waltham Abbey he had started collecting beetles as well as Lepidoptera and this added interest was to flourish. During the time he spent in London he worked the Home Counties extensively with, the then revolutionary, M.V. light and was rewarded on 13th June 1952 at Worth Forest with one of the very few *Lithacodia deceptor* Scop. ever taken.

Basil, who was an honorary member of our Society, first joined in 1931 and was prominent in our affairs for many years. He was a long-serving member of Council



Basil MacNulty, 1915–1994.

acting as Secretary between 1961 and 1968 and then as President in 1970. He will be especially well known to the majority of our members for his work over many years in organizing the annual dinner, and to those stalwarts who regularly attend for the introduction, after a long campaign, of the toast to "the founding fathers". This annual toast won against the prevailing tradition of no speeches will surely continue as an affectionate tribute to Basil. Over the years that Basil stood up to propose this toast it developed its own traditions with a feigned reluctance to rise, and the annual retelling of the story of the search for knotgrass by two of our founders.

Basil, was also a long-standing fellow of the Royal Entomological Society which he joined in 1957, and a keen supporter of the Amateur Entomologists' Society. Basil had two retirements, from his Ministry of Defence career in the mid-seventies when he moved on to research at Leeds University, and finally in 1983. Basil was able to join his wife in the house at Rhossili which they had bought in 1974 and assist her with running her guest-house.

He worked here on a list of the moths of the Gower as well as devoting much time to the, as yet unpublished, volume of *The moths and butterflies of Britain and Ireland* on geometers, drafting sections on Sterrhinae and Ennominae. Basil was keenly interested in the structure of pupae of Lepidoptera and encouraged his friends to let him have the exuviae of species they were breeding. Again his work on this area remained unpublished at his death. His presidential address to our Society was on the little-studied association of mites with insects. Amongst the numerous articles and notes which he contributed to the entomological press over the years may be mentioned in particular the series "Outline life histories of some West African Lepidoptera" which was published between 1966 and 1970 in our "Proceedings and Transactions" as then was, and a series published in the *Bulletin of the Amateur Entomologist's Society* entitled "So you want to study beetles".

All his notes and unfinished entomological research were passed to the National Museum of Wales together with the British part of his collection which numbered some twenty thousand specimens of Lepidoptera and beetles. The West African collections went to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington and contained 6000 specimens and much biological information.

Basil was a gregarious man with a love of good food and wine as well as company and could usually be found at the annual social gatherings of our society and its sisters deep in conversation. I well remember an occasion when my wife and I had been collecting with him on the Gower, a memorable night when we had watched phosphorescence on the sea, and carried generators nearly a mile over soft sand, returning to his home for him to open a bottle of Chateau Yquem at two in the morning!

Despite living so far from London, Basil kept involved with Society affairs to the end, always attending the Annual Exhibition and that of the AES as well as paying frequent visits to the Natural History Museum in connection with his research. He attended a Council Meeting to discuss dinner arrangements as recently as 1993. He did however feel somewhat cut off from other collectors and was always keen to go out collecting with those who visited him in Gower, confessing on the last such occasion I visited him that it was the first time that year that he had been out with the 'engine'.

Basil enjoyed a wide range of interests and was an accomplished actor and keen member of amateur dramatic societies in his younger days, on one occasion touring Ireland with a theatrical company. He wrote poetry and several plays for relaxation, one of which was produced in Croydon.

Basil was such a well known member of the entomological fraternity that he will long be remembered both for the work he performed and for his good fellowship and humour. We extend our sympathy to his family in their loss.

A. J. PICKLES